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ABSTRACT

This study examined the views of students completing an educational administration preparation program at Southwest Texas State University (SWT) and students completing a similar program (program acronym MADE) at the Instituto Politecnico Nacional in Mexico City. Graduates of both programs received master's degrees. A focus group methodology was used to explore perceptions of how students changed over the course of the program, what distinguished them from graduates of other programs, and how they felt about the quality of the experience. In Mexico, 25 students took part in 4 focus group sessions. In Texas, 22 current students and recent graduates participated in 5 focus group sessions. There was a difference in personal perceptions of change over time among the two student groups. MADE students spoke of national educational system issues, global awareness, and "commitment," while SWT students tended to talk more specifically about individuals as leaders, personal change, and used the term "confidence." Some of these differences were certainly related to programmatic content. Both sets of students expressed respect for conducting research, and both expressed the need for more time and practice with the concepts of research. The implications for future practice at both institutions are discussed. An appendix contains a curriculum comparison. (Contains 5 tables, 5 graphs, and 18 references.) (SLD)

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A Comparison of the Views of Educational Administration Students in the United States and Mexico

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Introduction

This study is an examination of the views of students completing an educational administration preparation program at Southwest Texas State University (SWT) with those completing a similar program, Maestria en Administracion y Desarrollo de la Educacion, or MADE, at the Instituto Politecnico Nacional (IPN) in Mexico City. A focus group methodology is used to explore perceptions of how students change over the course of the program, what distinguishes them from graduates of other programs, and how they feel about the quality of their experience. The analysis looks at four questions. First, what changes do the students report? Second, what are the similarities and differences between the student perceptions? Third, what is the source of the differences? And fourth, what are the implications for educational administration programs?

Changes for the students in the SWT program have already been reported in Slater, McGhee, and Capt (In Press). The students said they experienced a transformation in how they viewed themselves as people, and how they viewed teaching and administration. They embraced the use of action research and the need for data to make decisions. Students valued the positive reputation of the program, the combination of theory and practice, and the personal emphasis. However, they may have been reluctant to speak frankly and ask hard questions. The changes experienced by the MADE students will be reported later in this paper in comparison to changes for the SWT students.

The source of any differences between the perceptions of students in the two programs will be quite speculative since there are at least three variables: the difference in program structure, the difference in student backgrounds, and the difference in culture. Each of these variables merits some discussion. First is the difference between programs. The program at SWT is limited to teachers and beginning administrators who are preparing for a career in K-12 public education. Students earn a Master Degree in

Educational Administration in the College of Education and certification as a principal in K-12 public education. Courses are field and problem based and students design and implement a school-wide action research project.

Students in the MADE program come from a variety of backgrounds including engineering, business, and chemistry as well as elementary and higher education. MADE offers a Master Degree in Administration and Development of Education. The program attempts to raise the quality and relevance of education at the national, state and local level through the preparation of cadres of specialists in administration in middle and higher level education. Special emphasis is given to analysis, problem solving, and innovation in education and management. Students take three courses in research methodology and complete an extensive research thesis.

Differences in student perceptions could also come form the background of the students themselves. They are pursuing different careers, and while the differences did not appear to be great, there was no control for varying numbers of men and women, age or social class.

Review of Related Literature

The obvious planned difference from the selection of the two groups is that they come from different national cultures. Hofstede (1980) reports a classic study of the cultural differences of work-related values. He defines culture as, the collective programming of the mind which distinguishes the members of one human group from another (p. 25). These differences are important in many human endeavors not the least of which is the present study of educational administration. In fact, the rationale for this study is based on the idea that we will be able to see ourselves more clearly if we better understand cultural differences. Hofstede says, "the cultural component in all kinds of behavior is difficult to grasp for people who remain embedded in the same cultural environment" (p. 28).

Hofstede conducted an elaborate cross-cultural international study of workers and

identified four value dimensions that are especially relevant to differences between the United States and Mexico. Power Distance is the perceived interpersonal influence of the boss over the subordinate. It is much lower in the US than in Mexico where authority relationships are traditional. In the US there is more likely to be a valuing of work in teams, decentralization of authority, a horizontal power structure, and empowerment of employees. Mexico is also higher in uncertainly avoidance which includes an orientation toward rules to govern the workplace, employment stability, and higher feelings of stress. The US is higher on individualism which includes personal time, freedom, and challenge on the job. Mexico is high on masculine-feminine differences, but the US is not far behind.

In a review of American culture, Spindler and Spindler (2000) identify individualism, achievement orientation, equality, conformity, sociability, honesty, competence, optimism, and work as strong values. In his classic work on the Mexican and American character, Paz (1961) sees the American as trusting and confident, encouraging criticism, but keeping it on the surface rather then penetrating the roots. The Mexican is more pessimistic and ready to contemplate horror. He says,

> The North Americans are credulous and we are believers; they love fairy tales and detective stories and we love myths and legends...We are suspicious and they are trusting. We are sorrowful and sarcastic and they are happy and full of jokes. North Americans want to understand and we want to contemplate. They are activists and we are quietist; we enjoy our wounds and they enjoy their inventions. They believe in hygiene, health, work and contentment, but perhaps they have never experienced true joy which is an intoxication, a whirlwind. In the hubbub of a fiesta night our voices explode into brilliant lights, and life and death mingle together while their vitality becomes a fixed smile that denies old age and death but that changes life to motionless ston...(they) consider the world to be something that can be perfected, and ...we consider it something that can be

redeemed (p.23-24).

The differences between the Mexican and the North American can also be compared using Erikson's (1950) description of identity development. Ariza and Slater (In Press) outline this contrast from Erikson's earliest stage of trust versus mistrust to the last stage of integrity versus despair. These cultural differences can serve as tools to help understand the perceptions of graduate students in each country.

The last question to be addressed is what will be the implications of these results for educational administration programs. Spindler and Spindler (2000) urge us to pursue cultural sensitization not only to make a more understanding and peaceful world, but also to better understand ourselves. The task is to "make the familiar strange," and in so doing, our values become clearer, and we can see in new ways.

Leithwood and Duke (1998) give us framework to understand that leadership may be viewed quite differently from one culture to another. They identified six models from an analysis of the literature on leadership. They are: instructional leadership, transformational leadership, moral leadership, participative leadership, managerial leadership and contingent leadership. We might expect to see different models operating on each side of the border.

The Context

The need for effective leadership in public school administration has never been greater. Preparation programs in Educational Administration are essential to develop insightful leaders who will persevere, raise questions, take stands, and advocate for the interests of children. National studies and reports over the last few years have cited deficiencies in current programs and set out agendas for reform (National Commission on Excellence in Educational Administration, 1987; Boyan, 1988; National Policy Board for Educational Administration, 1989; Milstein, 1993, Murphy and Lewis, 1999). These reports typically call for increasing the number of minority candidates, giving attention to gender issues, focusing on curriculum and instructional improvements, improving the

internship or field experiences, using principles of adult learning, and preparing leaders for site-based decision making.

While these reforms need attention, there is risk that the field of Educational Administration is still looking inward, rather than developing a broad vision. The internationalization of educational administration offers an opportunity to move beyond mental and geographical borders. Chapman, Sackney, and Aspin (1999) call for "educational borrowing" of policy and practice, and a response to economic globalization that includes training in intercultural and foreign language skills.

Paige and Mestenhauser (1999) say, "Without systematic efforts...that call the attention of education administrators to knowledge produced in other settings, the field risks a de facto encouragement of a parochial mindset. Among other things, such parochialism may seriously limit the ability of practitioners to identify best practices in education, and it certainly results in a culture-bound way of thinking about educational problems" (p. 500). They call for in-depth understanding and an "international mindset" that includes intercultural and interdisciplinary dimensions.

Methodology

The primary goal of this research endeavor was to give voice to the views of students who have experienced the administrative training programs at Southwest Texas State University in San Marcos, Texas and Instituto Politecnico Nacional in Mexico City, Mexico. In particular researchers focused on exploring how students and graduates have come to understand themselves, what they know about administrative leadership, what they think about key aspects of this program, and how they relate to the public school environment.

The work of Patton (1990), Lincoln and Guba (1986), and Strauss and Corbin (1990) helped to guide this qualitative work. Such naturalistic inquiry is open-ended with few preconceived notions about the views of the participants. The goal is to understand their stories and report "thick descriptions" with less emphasis on causality. This type of study exerts less control than a quantitative approach but still must meet standards of verifiability through techniques such as "triangulation" which uses more than one source to confirm reports and statements. The method of "constant comparison" is a process of continual discovery, question, confirmation and comparison as data are collected and analyzed. Results may not generalize to other settings, but can meet the standard of "transferability" as determined by those who would apply the results.

In this study, the researchers opted for an interactive methodology for data and information gathering. "Focus groups are first and foremost a method for gathering research data…you collect and analyze information so that you can answer a question that addresses a need" (Morgan, 1998, p. 29). Such sessions are an effective way to garner opinions and responses in an intimate group setting. "Focus groups are fundamentally a way of listening to people and learning from them. Focus groups create lines of communication" (Morgan, p. 9). With the guidance of a six volume series of helpful and informative handbooks (Morgan & Krueger, 1998), the researchers fashioned a plan for conducting the sessions.

This study was designed, established and implemented at SWT during the spring semester of 2000. Staff associated with MADE attended a focus group session in San Marcos to participate in, oversee, and collaborate in the process. SWT faculty members made a reciprocal visit to Mexico City in late May of 2000 to assist in a field

test of the research process. All related materials were translated into Spanish and procedures and processes were replicated at IPN in February of 2001 when 25 students took part in 4 focus group sessions.

A number of issues were taken into account in developing the research protocol. These factors included numbers of sessions, group size, length of session, pre-session materials and preparation, furniture and seating arrangements, location of audio and video recording devices, number of questions, role and duties of the moderator, debriefing processes, and evaluation of and reflection on the focus group experience. Once these topics were addressed, the research team then turned its attentions to the development of the focus group questions.

Taking cues from the professional literature as well as the researchers own curiosities, a set of questions was drafted. The goal was to construct a comprehensive set of queries while keeping the number reasonable for a 90-minute session. Once the draft was prepared, it was reviewed by the educational administration faculty at both SWT and MADE. Based on comments and feedback from the groups, questions were modified and finalized and are presented below.

1. How have you changed during the course of your administration preparation program?

2. Please comment about your experiences as a learner while in the SWT/MADE administration program. (MADE: provide examples of your best and worse learning experiences.)

3. Please talk about the ways this preparation program has provided application for the practice of educational leadership.

4. Think about and comment on your experiences in using and gathering data and assuming the role of "researcher" while a student in this program.

5. As a student, you have been assessed in a variety of ways. Take a few moments to reflect on these assessments and comment about them.

6. As an SWT/MADE student/graduate, is there something that makes you different from graduates of other educational administration preparation programs?

The researchers, using graduate school and university databases identified a pool of potential participants. The target audience included those who had completed the program within the last year or who were currently enrolled in the last year of their program. A letter was sent informing these individuals of the study and soliciting their participation. As students/graduates contacted the researchers they were scheduled into a date and time slot. Five to six individuals were assigned to each focus group session.

Twenty-two current students and recent graduates participated in five focus group sessions conducted in March and April of 2000 at Southwest Texas State University. Of these participants 68% (N=15) were female and 32% (N=7) were male, representing four ethnic groups (4.5% African American, 4.5% Asian, 9% Hispanic, and 82% White). Forty-five percent of the focus group members work and/or reside in urban centers while 27% serve schools in what could be considered small Texas communities. Twenty-three percent of the participants represent suburban school districts. Participants reported wide variety in number of years of teaching experience (from 4 to 25 years). Of the 22 focus group members, 27% had 5 or fewer years, 55% reported 6-10 years, 4% 11-15 years, and 14% 20 years or more.

Unlike SWT students who come to the program exclusively from the teaching ranks, the 25 MADE students posses unique and varied backgrounds. Of the ten male and 15 female students who participated in the four focus groups sessions in February of 2001, five were teachers and two worked in higher education. While five other students were from the field of electronics or engineering, three worked in mathematics, history and sociology, respectively. The other ten students represented a variety of diverse fields, occupations and interests.

All participants were asked to arrive a half-hour before their assigned focus group start time. This afforded the group members an opportunity to enjoy a light snack, meet other session participants, and complete an individual information form provided by the researchers. One of the two principal investigators moderated each of the 90-minute discussions, alternating facilitation duties from session to session. Focus groups were audio and videotaped so that results could be accurately and thoroughly analyzed. At the opening of each session, participants were asked to introduce themselves and give a brief statement about their current assignment or professional situation. The moderator then read the following list of focus group guidelines.

1. We will carefully observe the 90-minute timeframe for this session.
2. All members will have an opportunity to participate in the discussion.
3. Sessions are being audio and videotaped so that results may be analyzed completely, yet the identity of participants in relation to specific comments will be held in strict confidence.
4. Because we are recording this session, please speak one at a time.

5. Moderators may find it necessary to redirect the discussion so that all topics and questions will be addressed in this session.

6. Speak in an open and honest manner.

7. Please do not mention specific names as we are not here to remark about individuals, but rather, the SWT/MADE Educational Administration training program.

Students were provided time to respond in writing to the focus group questions that were about to be posed orally, noting thoughts and examples they might want to share. The moderator then proceeded through each question, allowing all participants who wished to respond to do so. As participants spoke, the researchers documented their comments. Before moving to the next question, the moderator repeated some of the responses from her/his handwritten notes. This often generated several additional comments by group members before moving ahead to the next question.

Analysis and Results

Analysis of SWT Data

After the five sessions were complete, research team members reviewed their handwritten notes to identify themes emerging from student focus group responses. Based on this examination, data tables for each question were constructed to serve as framework documents for analysis. Viewing the videotapes of each session, researchers classified and tallied responses and recorded a variety of participants' quotations across the five sessions and six topic areas. Responses were analyzed horizontally to reveal common issues across the five groups.

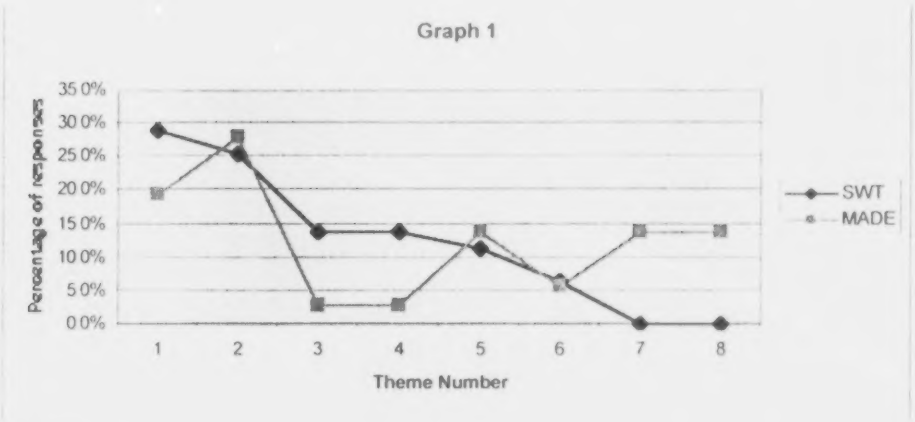
Analysis of MADE Data

Researchers took a slightly different approach with the MADE data. A professional colleague with knowledge of the language, culture and programmatic requirements of the Mexican university and MADE began by examining written responses of student participants. MADE focus group members provided written as well as oral responses. These were collected by the research team at the close of each session. The written pieces formed the basis of analysis for the MADE group. Using the previously established SWT frameworks, data sets were carefully analyzed. Themes not present in the original frameworks emerged from the MADE data and appear in the tables below. Frequency counts were converted to percentages for ease of comparison across groups. Additionally, the Spanish language focus group sessions were translated into English. The translations provided a rich source of anecdotes and quotations to support emerging themes and trends.

The tables below represent themes most common to each of the six questions explored in all focus groups as well as a frequency count and percent of responses to each theme. An analysis and comparison of the MADE and SWT groups follows each graphic representation.

Table 1: How have you changed during the course of your preparation program?

Themes	SWT	MADE	SWT %	MADE %
1 Professional skills & knowledge	23	7	29.1%	19.4%
2 Role Change / Perspective	20	10	25.3%	27.8%
3 Confidence	11	1	13.9%	2.8%
4 Better understanding of Self	11	1	13.9%	2.8%
5 Independent thinking	9	5	11.4%	13.9%
6 Learning styles	5	2	6.3%	5.6%
7 New job opportunities	0	5	0.0%	13.9%
8 Research interests	0	5	0.0%	13.9%
Total responses	79	36	100.0%	100.0%



Question #1

In response the first question, both SWT and MADE students said that they had experienced significant changes in role and perspective during the course of their graduate programs. SWT expressed these changes in personal terms and mentioned increased self-confidence while MADE program participants spoke of an increased commitment to address the educational problems of Mexico.

SWT participants did not speak about learning specific job tasks such as preparing a budget, disciplining students, or conducting a workshop. Rather, they focused on how they saw themselves differently, how they saw others differently, and how they had come to see school administration. In reference to themselves, the word confidence was repeated over and over. Some started the program and were "scared at first" and felt "apprehensive that it would be overwhelming." But, near the conclusion of the program, they said that they were more assertive, more inquisitive, and "anxious to take part" in school administration.

Several of the SWT participant comments illustrate what they learned about themselves: "I have become aware of the way that I learn." "The program changed me as a leader." "I am more aware of myself." "I am excited about learning and am able to look outside of the box for solutions." "I am much better at problem solving." "I discovered things inside myself." "I am more articulate." "I am more independent in my thinking." "I am more focused in what I want to do."

MADE students also spoke of individual growth but in the context of a global perspective and with frequent reference to the problems of Mexico and their commitment of to make changes. Often, the emphasis was more collective than individual. One student said, "MADE allowed me to have a global vision and a better understanding of the educational programs and educational system in Mexico...I have been able to understand the importance of culture and values in the process of individual growth and what the Mexican educational system means." Another referred to himself and others in the program when he said, "...we now have an attitude that makes us more committed to education." Another student expressed a desire to participate with others to solve

problems, "I realize that students face many learning problems...I'm concerned about looking for ways to participate, to be able to solve those problems through some type of contribution." Another said, "I am more interested now in the MADE program, knowing all of the ups and downs of education in our country, and I am very concerned about these problems."

Both groups emphasized individual growth and change. We could ask what might explain the more personal and individual emphasis of the SWT students versus the more global, collective stance of the MADE students. One explanation would be the difference in program structure. The SWT program begins with a course on leadership that is frequently mentioned by students as the most critical factor in affecting their development. The course uses a series of leadership inventories to analyze each student's approach to leadership. The emphasis is on the individual as students reflect on their own behavior, style, and skills. In MADE there is more study of the history and social conditions of education.

In another possible program difference, MADE students made immediate mention of the research skills that they attained and how they could be more systematic in addressing problems. The SWT students would more frequently reference skills that would help them do better on the job. The MADE program has an extensive thesis that requires complete dedication from students at the end of the program. The SWT program has a less extensive action research project which is carried out in the context of a practicum which takes place during the final year of the program.

There could also be cultural differences at work. The US approach is more individualistic and the Mexican, more collective. This latter more communal approach is

consistent with teamwork and collaboration to change organizations, but a collective emphasis might also suggest more resignation to the fate of the group. The individualistic perspective assumes a high level of control over events.

MADE students spoke of being more committed to education which might imply that changes come through force of will and, in turn, can be obstructed by political forces. SWT students did not mention commitment but appeared to see things from a more instrumental perspective. If the skills, knowledge and technology are discovered and applied, then educational conditions will improve.

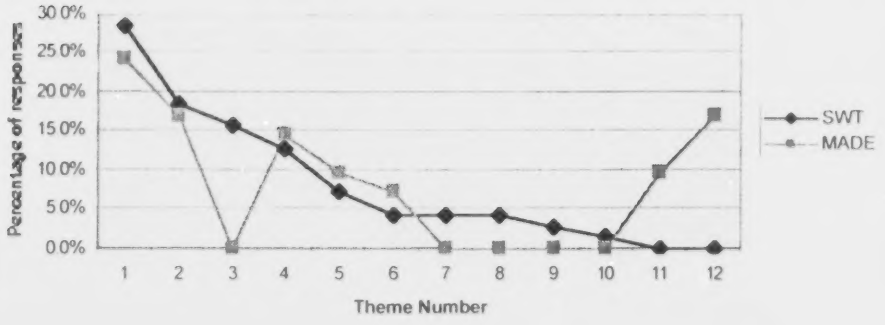
The more global perspective of MADE students may come from Mexico's awareness of arising out of historical events and being part of a larger system. The size of the US economy and its dominance in international affairs may extend to an unexamined assumption that its territorial limits are also the boundaries of knowledge and relevance.

MADE students also spoke more frequently about how the Master's degree would lead to economic advancement and new job opportunities. Certainly, this must also be part of the motivation of SWT students because the degree and certification make them qualified to be administrators in the schools, but they do not mention this directly. Perhaps, it is less acceptable to talk about job promotion and economic advancement as reasons for pursuing a course of study.

Table 2: Please comment about your learning experiences (MADE: share your best and worst experiences).

Themes	SWT	MADE	SWT %	MADE %
1 New Learning / Confidence	20	10	28.6%	24.4%
2 Supportive Instructors / Peers	13	7	18.6%	17.1%
3 Application / Real world	11	0	15.7%	0.0%
4 Collaboration	9	6	12.9%	14.6%
5 Class Availability Concerns	5	4	7.1%	9.8%
6 Technology	3	3	4.3%	7.3%
7 Working full-time/Family flexibility	3	0	4.3%	0.0%
8 Cohort - Positive	3	0	4.3%	0.0%
9 Cohort - Negative	2	0	2.9%	0.0%
10 Internship - Negative	1	0	1.4%	0.0%
11 Research difficulties	0	4	0.0%	9.8%
12 Partiality in evaluations	0	7	0.0%	17.1%
Total responses	70	41	100.0%	100.0%

Graph 2



Question #2

In response to the question about their experiences as learners, both groups mentioned new learning and confidence that they gained from the program and spoke

highly of the skills and knowledge of their teachers. Instructor-to-student and peer-to-peer relations are valued. SWT students commented, "I learned a lot about the experiences of the professors and from the backgrounds and expertise of other students" "I felt absolutely supported by professors with mentorship opportunities." "A good part of the program was the sense of camaraderie." A sense of collaboration was confirmed. Another student expressed the reasons she chose SWT for her Master's was because of the, "program's flexibility, the quality of professors, and professors who are willing to work with you." One participant reflected positively on supportive relationships. "Part of the confidence and commitment is being able to share with colleagues, and it is fundamental to experiences as a learner."

MADE students liked the diversity of students within the classes and made many positive comments about the relations with teachers and students. One student said, "The best experience was to exchange experiences and points of view with teachers." Another said, "The best experience was to have very well prepared teachers with a lot of experience and an open mind."

SWT students made more frequent mention of "real world" application. One student felt the program design took into consideration that students are working full time in schools and that assignments are linked to students' areas of interest. Another participant said, "We have the opportunity to refine what we have been taught in practice, and then when you go out into your real work environment, it doesn't faze you." Other participants remarked that course projects were based and implemented in the schools in which they taught. The research, data, and conclusions were actual and benefited both the student and the school.

The added emphasis on "real world" application by the SWT students in response to this question could be due to the program emphasis. The students are almost all practicing teachers or administrators who share examples from their work during classes. Several faculty have public school administrative experience and a significant amount of credit is given for a year long internship in the public schools. By contrast, the MADE program is based on university instruction.

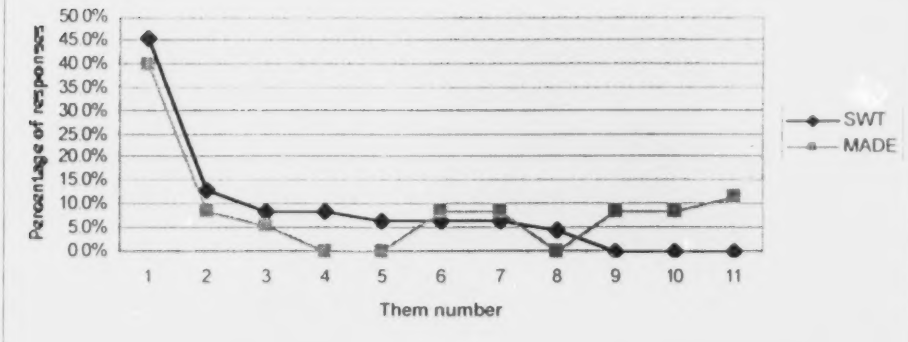
Unlike the SWT group, MADE students were invited to comment on both the best and worst experiences that they had had during the program. This question opened the door to several program criticisms. While overall assessment of students was viewed positively, the students mentioned some incidents when the perceived partiality on the part of a teacher, times when the teacher was unprepared, and times when they did not receive adequate feedback on papers. One student said, "...evaluation was not exactly as impartial as it should have been." And another said, "...the way we get evaluated is many times not the optimal..." And another said, "Unfortunately, I had some teachers who had nothing prepared for the class."

The MADE students also wanted a closer connection between the teachers who taught courses and those who supervised the thesis. One commented, "I consider that thesis orientation and formal advisors are...deficient."

Table 3: Talk about applications for the practice of educational leadership.

Themes	SWT	MADE	SWT %	MADE %
1 Theory / Practice, too	21	14	45.7%	40.0%
2 Experts presentation to classes	6	3	13.0%	8.6%
3 Data-Driven Decision Making	4	2	8.7%	5.7%
4 Internship - Negative	4	0	8.7%	0.0%
5 Internship - Positive	3	0	6.5%	0.0%
6 School-based Decision Making	3	3	6.5%	8.6%
7 University / School Partnerships	3	3	6.5%	8.6%
8 Appraisal Systems	2	0	4.3%	0.0%
9 Solving problems	0	3	0.0%	8.6%
10 New vision of education	0	3	0.0%	8.6%
12 Not enough promotion of leadership	0	4	0.0%	11.4%
Total responses	46	35	100.0%	100.0%

Graph 3



Question #3

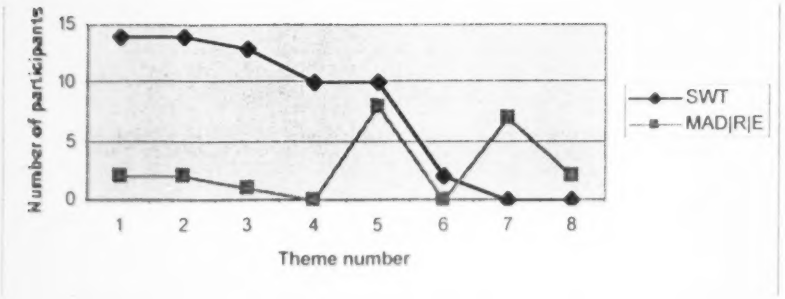
Table 3 shows responses to the question, "How has the program provided application for the practice of leadership?" Both MADE and SWT students mentioned

the articulation between theory and practice. SWT student comments included: "Every project was oriented to the classroom." "Everything I've learned has been real." "It's almost eerie how you can make immediate application from classes." They said the action research projects required of all students were "helpful" and allowed them to "explore new theory." The experience helped to teach "how to make data based change." "You need a knowledge base to lead, such as being able to design a survey."

The MADE students expressed similar sentiments, "MADE had given me strong preparation regarding management and leadership, it has contributed to an integrating process." Another student added, "Leadership is now seen in what we do." One student credited the program for helping him to be particularly effective on the job, "I have now created more programs with the same amount of resources year after year." However, some students said that there was not enough promotion of leadership.

Table 4: Talk about your experiences as a researcher while in the program.

Themes	SWT	MADE	SWT %	MADE %
1 Critical thinking/data driven decision	14	2	22.2%	9.1%
2 Importance of research	14	2	22.2%	9.1%
3 Preparation: APA / research skills	13	1	20.6%	4.5%
4 Course Sequence concerns	10	0	15.9%	0.0%
5 Time / Rigor	10	8	15.9%	36.4%
6 Non-availability of Library Resources	2	0	3.2%	0.0%
7 Not enough practice	0	7	0.0%	31.8%
8 Need better advising system	0	2	0.0%	9.1%
Total responses	63	22	100.0%	100.0%



Question #4

When asked to talk about the role of student researcher, SWT respondents reflected on the importance of research as a tool for critical thinking and data driven decision making. One participant expressed, "I have come to understand the importance of data to implement change in schools." Another explained that the research he conducted made him more aware of data resources and direction on, "how to find what you want by collecting sources, dissecting data, and understanding the importance of that data." One student explained the experience in research helped her learn the difference between fact and opinion, and because of this, she no longer takes what she reads at face value, but instead digests the information to draw her own conclusions.

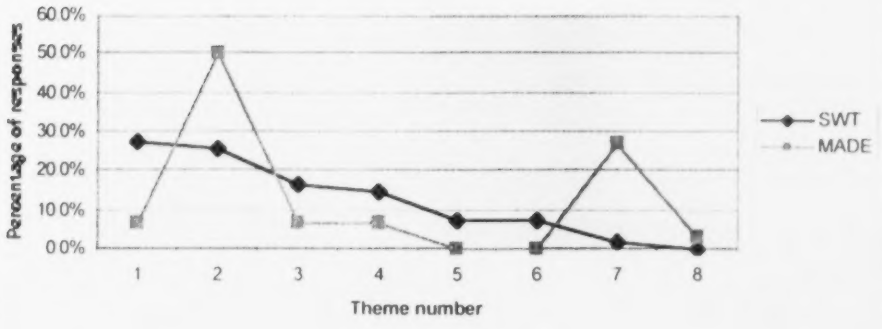
Both sets of students remarked about the time commitment and rigor involved in success research. While SWT participants mentioned the need for better preparation to use the American Psychological Association, or APA, writing style for the action research project, MADE students expressed a desire for more practice in the research arena in general (data collection, developing instruments, using statistics). A MADE student stated, "I do consider there to be a lack of training regarding collection of data." Another said, "...many of us did not know how to do research...we need more practice to become researchers." Positive reactions for the importance of research were tempered with suggestions for skill preparation. Specifically, course sequencing was mentioned at SWT. One suggestion offered was, "school as a center of inquiry (the research training

class) and integrative seminar (action research project) should be combined into a one year class." The rationale for this comment was that as students learn skills necessary to conduct research and analyze data, resources can be collected for use in the integrative seminar, which will optimize the time and accommodate the demands associated with planning, implementing, and evaluating a research project. MADE students, who must design, implement and write an extensive thesis to successfully complete their course of study expressed concern about the thesis advising system in the program.

Table 5: Reflect on the ways you were assessed while a student in the program.

Themes	SWT	MADE	SWT %	MADE %
1 Program holds students accountable	15	2	27.3%	6.7%
2 Variety of Assessments	14	15	25.5%	50.0%
3 Reflection - Positive	9	2	16.4%	6.7%
4 Objective Test - (neg.)	8	2	14.5%	6.7%
5 Qualifying Exam - Positive	4	0	7.3%	0.0%
6 Qualifying Exam - Negative	4	0	7.3%	0.0%
7 Subjective evaluations in some cases	1	8	1.8%	26.7%
8 Lack of feedback	0	1	0.0%	3.3%
Total responses	55	30	100.0%	100.0%

Graph 5



Question #5

Table #5 shows the participants' reflections on how they were assessed in their respective programs. Both MADE and SWT students remarked about the variety of assessments that were conducted and facilitated. A MADE student stated, "I think I was well evaluated…One teacher used to tell me, 'I do not want a synthesis, but an analysis.' It bothered me at first but this has truly helped me."

SWT respondents said assessments are a necessary part of the program and felt that students should be accountable for learning and demonstrating proficiency. Philosophical statements about testing included: "You must take tests to prove what you know." Of the assessments mentioned, student reflections were greatly favored. "They provide an opportunity to internalize new learning and express thoughts and feelings." Objective tests, on the other hand, were universally disliked. Students commented: "I was bothered by a 50 question multiple choice test after four projects. It felt like an insult." "Recall exams are meaningless…they don't effectively measure." "Tests should show what we have learned. I resent tests of regurgitation."

SWT participants also mentioned assessment through papers, presentations, applications and collaborations. "Writing about experiences done in class and presentations are a better way." "Assessment is necessary. I prefer to write papers or reflections. We do a lot of work collaboratively, but you have to know that students can apply work on their own." "You can demonstrate learning with a partner. Working collaboratively is not easy." "You learn to give a little and take a little. I like to have a variety of assessments." MADE students are also encouraged to write during their

training program. One student remarked, "The essays are a very valuable exercise for students. I think students should be graded through their essays."

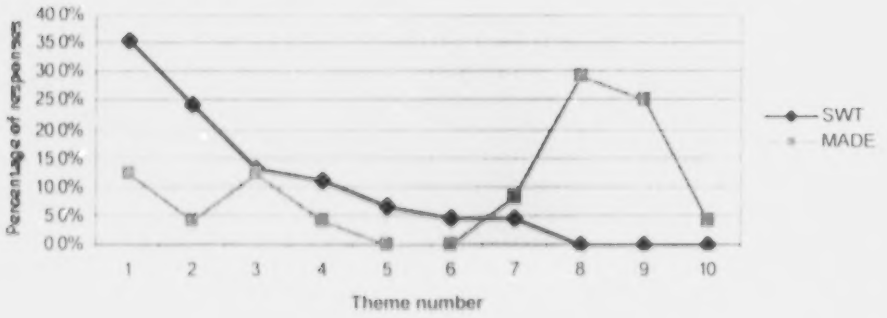
Several SWT students said they already knew some of the required course material and felt they should be given more credit for their experience, but on the whole, students said they "were impressed with assessment. There is a balance between written and oral." "The focus was on learning, quality and growth."

While some MADE students expressed concern about occasional subjectivity in evaluations and assessments, others expressed satisfaction with the grading policies and procedures. "The grading process has a percent of subjectivity that is very difficult to eliminate. However, grading in a Master's program is also part of the learning process."

Table 6: Is there something that makes you different from graduates of other programs?

Themes	SWT	MADE	SWT %	MADE %
1 People oriented	16	3	35.6%	12.5%
2 Balance of theory & practice	11	1	24.4%	4.2%
3 Credibility of the program	6	3	13.3%	12.5%
4 Program Flexibility - Positive	5	1	11.1%	4.2%
5 Satellite campus location (+)	3	0	6.7%	0.0%
6 Satellite campus location (-)	2	0	4.4%	0.0%
7 Program Flexibility - Negative	2	2	4.4%	8.3%
8 Distinctiveness (focus on management)	0	7	0.0%	29.2%
9 They don't know	0	6	0.0%	25.0%
10 Need more support services	0	1	0.0%	4.2%
Total responses	45	24	100.0%	100.0%

Graph 6



Question #6

MADE students feel their program is distinctive not only because of its focus on administration but its broader scope of social and cultural issues. "...This program

includes subjects that are social and human oriented, such as teaching cultural and ethical values development." MADE instructors are also held in high regard. A student shared a story about her sister who had to leave the program to pursue her education at another institution because of location and time schedule issues. Although the other program was more convenient, she readily admitted the quality of the teaching staff could not compare to the instructors at MADE.

According to SWT focus group members, the program is people oriented and balanced in theory and practice. One student said, "We're people oriented." Another said, "Professors are concerned about you personally." "Many can learn knowledge, but few can learn people skills. The program should weed out those without people skills. Narrow minded people can't transform education." Another student agreed but added, "professionals should counsel students (with interpersonal problems) because some can change."

The balance of theory and practice was discussed as an issue of the training and experience of the professors. "Administrators have come up through ranks in Texas. They will believe theory if the professor has been there." "The teachers have come from the field. No one is from the outside. It is helpful to say I've been there. The professors are practical and current." Another student commented about an experience in another university, "After being a professor, you can distance yourself from the real world. Professors need to be in the schools. Some professors don't know what it's like."

Students also spoke proudly about the reputation of MADE and its students. One said, "The prestige of the program at Politecnico is well known and I am very satisfied

with having taken the program here." Another remarked, "MADE students are strongly committed."

One SWT focus group was especially positive in response to the last question and their comments seemed to encourage one another. "I've made a good network and could get a job if I moved." " SWT has credibility and a good reputation. I wouldn't hesitate hiring an SWT grad." "I'm being educated as a whole person, not just as a leader. I'm excited about learning and people see it, the way we carry ourselves." "One professor said, 'we are not here to weed you out, we are here to help you be the best administrator you can be'…They build on the differences in each person."

Conclusions

Analysis of student comments, concepts from the professional literature, and programmatic areas of emphasis at MADE and SWT raise a number of interesting issues relating to this research endeavor.

Change

There appears to be a difference in personal perceptions of change over time among the two student groups. MADE students spoke of national educational system issues, global awareness, and often mentioned the word "commitment" while SWT students tended to talk more specifically about individuals as leaders, personal change, and used the term "confidence." Some of these differences are most certainly related to programmatic contrasts. (See Appendix A.) The orientation of the SWT program targets school leadership, campus improvement and administrators as instructional leaders where MADE is more oriented to educational and institutional system development, organization and management. This could well account for some variance in responses.

Research

SWT students engage in a school-based action research project while MADE student design, conduct and write a formal thesis. Undoubtedly, there are advantages and disadvantages to each approach in educational administrative training programs. Both sets of students expressed a healthy respect for conducting research, giving credence to the time commitment and rigor required to design and facilitate a meaningful and substantive study. Both groups also seem to see a need for more time and practice with the concepts of research to develop skills and competence over time. SWT students requested greater linkage between the two semesters of research courses and MADE students asked for more practice and direct assistance with the tools of research.

Several striking discoveries may well serve as *calls for action* at these administrative training sites. Program planners at Instituto Politecnico Nacional and Southwest Texas State University are carefully considering the following issues as potential targets for change.

Implications for future practice at MADE

•Consider extensive use of focus group methodologies, such as the process used in this study, to review policies and practices, and determine positive direction for program structure and protocol.

•Strive to meet the escalating demand for administrative training programs in Mexico through greater use of distance and on-line learning technologies, including those that involve international collaborations and exchanges.

•Increase opportunities to practice the craft of administration by replacing the thesis requirement with a formal internship (practicum).

Implications for future practice at SWT

•Nurture the concept of commitment to nation and profession among students in the program. In Texas, there is a noticeable focus on local control, even with a mandated curriculum and statewide accountability system in place. Students and graduates appear to see themselves more as individuals working in isolated schools and independent school districts rather than members of a broader national educational community.

•Encourage students to engage in open, honest, challenging exchanges. MADE students seemed to pose questions, taking positions, and remark about improved earning capacity and employment opportunities more readily than did SWT students.

Efforts such as this comparison of the views of educational administration students in the United States and Mexico are solid starts in improving educational leadership pre-service programs. As voices are heard and insights shared, energies and actions will certainly follow.

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Appendix A

Curriculum Comparison

Program Components	**Curriculum for SWT**	**Curriculum for MADE**
Pre-required Courses	None	2 or 4 Courses Graduate level
Core Curriculum	13 Courses	10 Courses (Interdisciplinary) (2 on research methods & 2 Thesis Seminar)
Elective Courses	None	3 Courses (Selected from 17 Courses)
Elective Seminar	None	1 Seminar (Selected from 5 Seminars)
Final Degree Requirements	1. Action Research Project 2. Year-long Practicum	Formal Thesis (10 Options)
Overall Orientation	1. School Improvement 2. Instructional Leadership	1. Educational System Development 2. Organization & Management